THE EDUCATION OF THE RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION.

An Address

DELIVERED IN

MANCHESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD,

ON

OCTOBER 18TH, 1898,

BY

J. ESTLIN CARPENTER, M.A.

The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines.

Manchester:
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'By words
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted:—and how exquisitely, too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) which they with blended might
Accomplish:—this is our high argument.'

WORDSWORTH, *The Recluse.*

The Education of the Religious Imagination.

ADDRESS.

GENTLEMEN,

The College which formally opens its doors to you to-day, at the beginning of another Academic year, is founded on the assumption that there is a branch of knowledge which may be properly designated 'theological.' Its purpose is to expound that knowledge, to define its limits, determine its characteristics, and set forth its contents. Such an aim may properly be regarded as an end in itself. It is concerned with the most sublime of all enquiries. It is inexhaustible in its scope, as it is likewise boundless in its interest. There is no one to whom it can be unimportant, for it seeks to set the world and life, the majesty of the universe, the vicissitudes of history, the needs and destiny of each single soul, in their true theoretical relations with the infinite Being to whom we give the name that is above every name—GOD. To pursue this august way of learning along its various paths, to interrogate its mysteries, can never fail to awaken the passionate enthusiasm of the student; and to re-shape its results in connection with the advance of knowledge in other fields may well be the life-long occupation of a continuous succession of faithful labourers who humbly seek this way of service to their time.

But you have chosen another form of ministry, that of Religion. That is concerned—do you need the warning?—not with the forms of our thought, but with the life of the spirit, its endeavours after righteousness, its relation to the unseen.

In that ministry the pursuit of ideal truth can never be treated with indifference. New aspects of reality offer themselves continually to the open and reverent mind; and the teacher who has ceased to learn soon finds that his scanty stock of lore is all expended; he can no longer feed others, for he has not replenished himself. The studies that you begin here, therefore, you must never relax. You will, of course, frequently change their special direction. But you must not abandon their ultimate object. You will stand hereafter on the deepest of all facts, the communion of the soul of man with God. To apprehend it yourselves with such vividness that you can quicken it in others, to draw out its implications and make it the groundwork of noble conduct, this will be your task. There is more here than theoretical knowledge. There are practical arts of effective utterance of the spoken word, and of effective expression of the inner thought and feeling. There is the sympathetic appreciation of the joys and sorrows of others, their aspirations and their perplexities, their sufferings and their sins. There is the understanding of *men* as well as the comprehension of *Man*. You will have to deal not with the abstractions of the lecture-room, but with the concrete forms of temptation and achievement as they will meet you in all the manifold groups of human action. As you enter into these you will be powerfully affected by them. It may seem incredible to you now in the dawn of fresh confidence, in the entrancing beauty and the kindling joy of the vision which has thus far led you on, that faith should fail or love grow cold. But you must prepare yourselves to meet difficulty, to face hours of despondency, to bear weariness, exhaustion, disappointment. You may be baffled in the realm of pure intellect, or overwhelmed with tragedies of moral despair, till you are ready to cry with Tennyson, 'It is very hard to believe in God': well will it be for you if you can add as he added, 'but it is harder still not to believe in him.'

I.

With this outlook what help can you gain in college learning? I answer 'much, every way'; but you must suffer me to remind you at the outset that the profit of your student-years will arise not only from what is offered to you, but from what you in your turn contribute. It is, perhaps, needless to renew the assurance that the liberty which this College professes is no illusory liberty. Ours is in truth no recently adopted foundation. It was an ancient maxim that the way of philosophy must be free—ἐλεύθερον εἶναι δεῖ τῇ γνώμῃ τὸν μέλλοντα φιλοσοφεῖν,* though only few may as yet be ready to apply the saying to theology,—ἐλεύθερον εἶναι δεῖ τῇ γνώμῃ τὸν μέλλοντα θεολογεῖν. Significant, indeed, were the words of Jowett to Stanley forty years ago: 'I entirely agree with you that no greater good could be accomplished for religion and morality than the abolition of all subscription; but how will this ever be promoted in the least degree, or how will it be possible for any one in high station ever to propose it, if we only talk it over in private?'† To this conviction this College has sought for more than a hundred years to give public, if modest, expression; and its presence at the gates of the University of Oxford is a declaration that it will jealously guard its high trust.

But you know that the removal of ecclesiastical restraint cannot ensure openness of mind. You are asked to sign no orthodox formula: have you purged yourselves of the intolerance, the prejudice, the antagonism, which are apt to rise among the sufferers by exclusion, or of the ignoble complacency that we are not as those that are bound? And, if so, are you prepared to concede that each teacher, as well as each student, should have his own ideal alike of the whole field of research and of his special department in it? Will you loyally recognise that he

* Quoted by John Smith, *Select Discourses*, i. § 1.
† *Life*, i. 275.

must follow his own methods, and express through them his own personality ? In truth the freedom which is only used as a ground for self-assertion is destitute of any saving grace: it only becomes sweet and helpful when it is wedded with humility. Before the immense vistas of our study, where almost every avenue of enquiry passes out beyond our reach, and the wise and noble have again and again trodden different ways, the frequent confidence of ignorance may well be abashed. No Pythagorean discipline of silence and submission will be laid upon you; but I would commend to you the searching words of one of the most eminent of the children of light in modern Oxford, the late Richard Lewis Nettleship: 'I am sure that the principles of all methods for acquiring the mastery over anything are substantially the same. One has got to begin with the alphabet, to become a little child. Instead of which, it seems to me, one is perpetually beginning with the hardest things,—solving the existence of God before one has ever seen what it means to exist at all. If I had to begin over again, I should like to try to master the elements of a few big things.'* Amid the varieties of intellectual solicitation,—must I add, also, of social distraction ?—with which Oxford abounds, the homely excellences of concentration, persistence, faithfulness, are easily thrust out of sight. Yet they are the conditions, I do not say of distinction—to that you are not summoned—but of attainment such as is within the reach of all. When Zoroaster's scholars (to quote the apologue of John Smith†) asked him what they should do to get winged souls, such as might soar aloft in the bright beams of divine truth, he bids them bathe themselves in the waters of life; they asking what these were, he tells them the four cardinal virtues which are the four rivers of paradise. To be simply steadfast, to have a wise method of living, to produce appointed work by appointed times, to maintain a vigilant self-control over

* *Remains*, i. 97. † *Select Discourses*, i. § 1.

habits, and guard against excesses of labour which must be balanced by excesses of idleness,—these are not counsels of perfection. They may not be needed by the prophet, but they cannot be safely disregarded by the scholar. For there is a 'foolishness of the body,' to use the words of the dying Socrates to Simmias,* 'of which we must be rid before we can be pure and hold converse with the pure, and know of ourselves the clear light everywhere which is no other than the light of truth.' Over the gate of the temple of Epidaurus, says Clement of Alexandria,† was the solemn warning, 'he that would enter the fragrant shrine must be pure,' and purity, he adds, 'is to think holy things.' If, then, you can call to mind the freshness of your first self-dedication to your high calling, if there still lives with you the remembrance of some morning hour when 'bond unknown' to you was given that you should be, according to your measure, 'a dedicated spirit,' cherish its 'thankful blessedness.' Let no decline of faith cloud your fair visions; no languor lay its chill on noble purpose; no weariness of drudgery, no disappointment in your course of study, no want of sympathy with your guides, vex you with disillusion. Enter the sanctuary: seek once more the things which are above: and remember that the way of search is prayer.

II.

If these be the gifts of character and self-devotion which the College expects from you, what has it in its turn to give? It offers you 'theological knowledge.' I am not here now to justify this offer to an indifferent and thoughtless world, or to the interested but suspicious critic who disputes the reality of that which we profess to impart. But I am to ask for a moment how our conception of theological knowledge differs from that which you may find elsewhere, what bearing this difference has

* *Phaedo*, 67; Jowett's *Plato*[3], ii. 206. † *Strom.* v. 1, 13.

upon our common studies, and how these are related to your future aim.

The condition to which I have already adverted as the basis of all teaching and learning in this place, is itself an implicit answer to the first of these enquiries. For it involves the belief that in our thought of God there can be no finality. Each age must ask its own questions, and frame its own answers. The questions, indeed, may be identical in substance, if not in form, with those which have arisen out of the human heart from immemorial antiquity. The answers may be no clearer, or no nearer the reality, than those of past generations. But they have a special meaning for us, because they deal with our problems and are concerned with our perplexities. They include some elements of experience which enter the field for the first time, or at least present themselves in a shape and with an emphasis unknown before. This conviction—I do not pause now to ask how it has been gained—is incompatible with the claims that have been raised on behalf either of a special church or of a special book to sole inspiration by the spirit of God; and it leads to a complete transformation of the method and scope of theological enquiry. So long as religions were divided into two categories, one of which contained the only true, and the other all the multitudinous false,* the student had only to satisfy himself in whose keeping was the deposit of the saving faith, to reject at once all other avenues of knowledge. Their teachings were either similar, in which case they were superfluous, or

* 'The first general division of *Religion* is into *True* and *False*. *True* Religion must ever be the same and invariable, and therefore there can be but ONE TRUE RELIGION. That infinite variety, therefore, in the doctrines and modes of worship, which have prevailed in the world (one only scheme excepted), are but so many deviations from the truth, so many FALSE RELIGIONS. This is a very copious subject; and, indeed, the chapter of *False Religion* is by much the longest in the History of the religious opinions and practices of mankind.'—Preface to Broughton's *Dictionary of all Religions*, 1745. Many echoes of this have been heard in our own day, as when a distinguished Oxford professor spoke of the 'three chief false religions,' Brahmanism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism. (Monier Williams, *Indian Wisdom*, ed. 3, 1876, p. xxxvi.).

divergent, in which case they were wrong. The task of the theologian, then, was simple. When once he had justified his authority, he could proceed to set forth its dogmas, and deduce their results. Differences of method might, indeed, arise in the process of ascertaining the contents and implications of the divine oracle. A single text of scripture might suffice for one investigator, while another would endeavour to reach the mind of the Holy Spirit through a comparison of his varied, if not actually conflicting, utterances. But the result in any case was final. There lay behind it no further court of appeal. Whatever could be proved to be legitimately derived from its decrees, shared the same character of absolute knowledge, irrefragable certainty, and saving truth.

For this conception the complex forces vaguely known as 'modern thought' have substituted another. It is, indeed, less clear and definite, though it need not on that account be less true and real. It does not formulate itself in creeds, but it offers itself as the ultimate justification of all belief. It refuses to be limited in its expression to a single book, it claims the higher literature of the race as its own field. It denies the exclusive pretensions of any single institution to its possession, and affirms that it may be found on every altar where honest sacrifice is offered, nay, in every heart which makes the daily oblation of love and duty. It approaches the whole question of the divine nature, of the purposes of God, and the destiny of man, no longer by way of deduction from certain supernatural data, but by way of apprehension from the manifold forms of human experience. It appeals for its Bible from a chosen race to history at large; for its Church to the consensus of holy souls who in all ages have been 'friends of God and prophets.' It sees its sacred ark in the shrine of our inner thoughts; its solemn law in the reason and the conscience; its Shechinah or Real Presence in the aspirations and affections which rise

unceasingly towards the eternal. Theological knowledge thus becomes wide as the universe around us. It draws within its scope the majestic order of nature so far as it is the expression of God's ideas, the method by which his thought and will are wrought into the sequences of visible things: and on this side of its domain it seeks to assimilate the ascertained and even the tentative conceptions of science, and declares itself not its antagonist but its partner in the perpetual endeavour to understand the world. Does it turn to the past to survey the progress of mankind? From the dim vistas of prehistoric time, up to the latest conflicts of our day, it discerns the nexus of enlarging deepening faith; till it asserts religion to be a practically universal power, finding provision for her own maintenance in the structure of the human mind, and its permanent connection with the great Whole in which it lives.

This is not, indeed, to affirm that all experience is equally valuable, any more than to say that if you know the multiplication table you can dispense with the differential calculus. There are differences of worth in the several products of the vanished years; nor do the manifold forms of contemporary religion rise into one monotony of excellence. The application of intellectual and moral tests to the various types in which religion has been presented, at once marks them off, more or less clearly, into groups, and assigns them places of precedence or inferiority among the influences which have contributed to the education of the race. Foremost among these, whether by intrinsic eminence of nobility, by its historic importance, or by its extraordinary power of sustaining innumerable transformations in doctrine and polity and yet living on, stands, by general consent, the religion of Jesus. No single creed can be said to exhaust it. It cannot be regarded as complete in any one of its manifestations. Whatever foreign elements it has taken up into itself it has either rapidly cast out and left behind, or it has so absorbed that they

became new sources of strength, while they sometimes profoundly changed its essential character. It is admitted, on all hands, that the Christianity which greets us in the churches to-day is the result of age-long developments. The claims of these developments to be the legitimate heirs of the teachings of Christ must be examined. You must learn to appreciate the varied forms of religious life which they have produced upon the way; you must enter with sympathy into the struggles by which their principles have alike been inly moulded and outwardly expressed, and their types of character and devotion shaped. But, above all, I need not say that you must be familiar with their sources in the New Testament: you must endeavour to understand the reasonings of Paul and the insights of John; you must sit at the feet of Jesus, learn of him to say 'Our Father,' and enter into the open secret of the 'kingdom of heaven within you.' Nor can you do this without tracing the roots of his trust in the older history of his race, and watching the growth of that national religion which uttered itself in prophecy and law and psalm, till the hour and the man appeared and the faith of Israel was ready to set forth and win the world.

The special studies which I have thus barely described in two minutes, are, of course, sufficient to occupy a lifetime. They involve much patient toil; their successful pursuit continually demands laborious application, minute mastery of detail, acquaintance with obscure languages, the sympathetic reconstruction of social and intellectual conditions, which have otherwise little interest or importance. Be not neglectful of them; the peaks of higher insight rise over the fields of homely culture which clothe their lower slopes; the disciples who followed Jesus on to the mount of Transfiguration could not escape a long and laborious climb.

I would invite you, however, to range—more superficially, indeed, yet, I hope, not altogether without profit—over an area

that is wider still. Not only the evolution of Christianity, or of Judaism, must engage your thought; around these there lies that of religion itself. It has been my duty, on a previous occasion, to offer to the students of this College some considerations on 'The Place of the History of Religion in Theological Study.' It is only needful now to remind you that it is by this time frankly conceded that all questions of doctrine and institution, of creed and ritual, must be studied in the light of their progressive development; and that, while there are many kinds of voices in the world, no kind is without signification. Yet the importance of each can only be judged in its relation to all, and the meaning and connections of the parts must be determined by their harmony in the whole. And of that whole, so far as we know it, what conception can we form? The record may be interpreted in different ways, according to the term from which we start. Do we fix our thoughts on the slow steps by which from rude beginnings man has advanced to clearer thought and purer faith, do we look at his toil-worn efforts, his painful strivings, his frequent lapses, his heroic struggles upon the upward way? We shall conceive the process as the slow discovery of God by man. Do we concentrate our attention on the unexpectedness with which new insight has visited him, on the lofty minds which have been the channels of fresh ideas, on the great souls from which have issued the creative impulses of holiness and love? We shall discern a divine initiative breaking through the veil at point after point, and we shall envisage the mighty movement as the gradual revelation of God to man. A recent writer has described the career of Jesus of Nazareth as 'the human life of God.'* In the light of the conception which I have tried briefly to set forth, that life cannot be limited to a single historical person; it is manifested, not through an individual exclusively, but through the race. There *is* a life of God in man; there *is* a

* Van Dyke, *The Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, 125.

life of man in God. How can we recognise it, how share it when we have beheld it? The answer to this question lies, not in the methodised investigations of the class-room, but in the experience of practical religion. Yet so far as this depends on intellectual processes which are capable of being pursued in common, some guidance may be suggested here by way of anticipation for your future work.

III.

The way of the knowledge of God (it is now generally conceded) no longer lies through the passive reception of a positive divine teaching. The declaration in the thunder-peals of Horeb, which still stands in so many of our parish-churches, 'God spake these words, saying, I am the Lord your God,' belongs no more to the sphere of actual fact. It has been dislodged from the history to find its place in the great epic of Israel's youth; for the sublime 'Words' first became articulate centuries later among the hills of Canaan. The books of law and prophecy which they heralded are now acknowledged to have gradually assumed their present form through the labours of many generations. Their authors are for the most part unknown, and the literary conditions of their production are such as to render for ever impossible the older and traditional conceptions of their supernatural origin. Wisely, therefore, does one of the latest apologists, the learned and genial Dr. Bruce, drop from his scheme the related themes of revelation, of miracles, and inspiration.* Will you turn, then, to the court of philosophy for the assurance which external testimony can no longer afford? I admit to the full its right to question, but forget not the diversities of its reply. It is its aim to interpret for us our experience, to explain to us how we can know ourselves, the world, and God: in Europe alone it has been engaged upon its

* *Apologetics; or Christianity defensively stated* (International Theological Library).

problem more than two thousand years; yet its different schools are for ever divided as to what we are, what the world is, and whether there is a God. The uncertainties of speculation were early contrasted with the assurances of revelation, and Augustine could make merry over Varro's enumeration of 288 possible systems. The complaint was not new. Nearly a millennium before, Gotama the Buddha had justified his contempt for the Brahmanical scholasticism of his day by exhibiting sixty-two ways of error concerning the world conceived as finite or infinite in extension, limited or eternal in duration, and concerning the various modes of the future existence of the soul.* The number might be indefinitely expanded now, when it is almost true to say *Quot Philosophi tot sententiae.* Are we, then, to give up the quest in despair? Newton might warn the physicist to beware of metaphysics; would he have addressed the same caution to the theologian? Are we to rest contented in the assumption that between our faculties and the world without us there is so little correspondence, that we can never know reality? The answer depends upon the significance which you attach to the act of knowledge, and the amount and character of the reality which you believe yourself to know. Be prepared to find these change. The great teacher, the 'marble index' of whose mind was unveiled for us this afternoon, has described to us the revolution in his own self-comprehension which converted him from a disciple of the necessarianism of Priestley and Hartley into a successor of Butler and Kant. In the same manner you may, in your turn, emerge from what have been wittily designated the 'ontological reveries' of Hegel, even when they are presented to us in the persuasive utterance, vivified by the spiritual life, and fired by the noble moral enthusiasm of the Master of Balliol. The warning of Dr. Martineau—'Religion that is mere metaphysics offers us but a pale and icy reality: religion without

* Brahmajāla Sutta, in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, i. 1, 30; 3, 72.

metaphysics offers us but a painted dream,'*—will remain true for the abstract thinker. You cannot even banish metaphysic without in some form admitting its claim. You must get a formula, even if you discard it next week. You must frame your hypothesis, though it should break in your hands in the face of facts too big for it to embrace. You must try to build your system, even if only to convince yourself that the infinite will still escape out of some back-door. But if you want to use philosophy as a method of discovery,—I speak, of course, not as a philosopher, still less as a prophet, but 'as a fool,'—you must remember that what it will chiefly disclose to you is the limit and inconsistency of your own thought.

The worshipper, however, is not perpetually seeking a rational justification of his religion. It is there. It is wrought into his life by manifold experiences. He cannot question its validity, he has been too often in the Presence-chamber. What he desires is that the vision which he has beheld occasionally, may be more constant; that the exalted sense of communion with the Eternal which he has sometimes enjoyed, may be renewed within him more frequently; that he may discern, as Socrates said, 'the clear light everywhere, which is no other than the light of truth,' and feel the flame of devotion burn with steadier glow. And in this respect, I think, the function of the teacher of religion (which you are hereafter to assume), is not so much to convince the reason as to aid in training and enlightening the spiritual insight. Let me call it, for I have my formula also, 'the Education of the Religious Imagination.'

It is true that this great power is sometimes disparaged as if it were concerned only with such stuff as dreams are made of. We regard its creations as unreal, like centaurs or men 'whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders.' We conceive it to operate apart from things as they are, and we view it therefore

* 'Ideal Substitutes for God,' *Essays*, &c., iv. 289.

with suspicion rather than with trust. The fact is that we are continually employing it as the instrument of our thought; for it is its constant task to present to our inner eye the objects that lie beyond the things of sense. For many minds, thinking is conducted by a succession of pictures. We apprehend the meaning of the undulatory theory of sound or light by the help of the memory of the *ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα* of the ocean wave. The dizzy heights of abstraction, the severe and thorny paths of logic, are only possible in so far as they reveal themselves to vision; we can only reason where we first can see. So it is by the aid of imagination that we unlock the secrets of the world around. 'The life of the imagination,' says Ruskin in his paradoxical way, 'is the discovery of truth.' Lay it to rest, and you would still recognise the succession of dawn and eve, of ebb and flow, of seed blade ear and ripened grain, acorn and oak, but 'the soul of force would be dislodged from your universe';* you would no longer bind its manifold happenings into one whole; you would know neither cause nor effect; you would confess no law. What but imagination constructs the mental pictures which flash upon the discoverer's inward eye, and slowly yield themselves afterwards to the verifications of reason? When Oken picked up a skull upon the open heath and exclaimed 'It is a vertebral column,' when Harvey conceived the circulation of the blood, when Newton 'passed from a falling apple to a falling moon,' the transition was effected by a leap of the imagination. The experimentalist who seeks to account for the behaviour of matter in its various forms, solid or gaseous, by different hypotheses of the shapes and sizes, the movements, the velocities, of constituent molecules, is in like manner constructing pictures which other minds may visualise. They are applied to successive groups of facts, they are modified and reconstructed to accommodate new conditions, but they do not cease to appeal to

* Tyndall, on the *Scientific Use of the Imagination.*

our mental gaze. It is by a similar process that we learn to understand each other. Outwardly we should be no more than little heaps of colour, form, bulk, weight, of tall or short, of dark or fair, but for the imagination which informs the whole with spirit, and knows that speech proceeds from thought and act from will, and thought and will do but show forth a soul. The gift of sympathetic imagination varies, indeed, largely from mind to mind. It is the key to the appreciation of character, which often acts so rapidly that we describe it as 'inly glancing,' or intuitive. A few moments of intercourse leave one man still blind, while another has gained an insight into a fresh nature and comprehends a whole life. If there be steps of reason which can afterwards be set forth by processes of analytic judgment, they are traversed so swiftly that we are unconscious of them. By this means, also, do we reconstruct the past, detect the operation of the intellectual or moral forces which have left their impress on any given age, realise the personality of hero or prophet, or trace the gradual phases and complex issues of social change. To the significance of these operations language bears constant, if unintentional, testimony. Our final reply to an argument which we reject, is to say, 'I cannot see it.' Our 'theories' are only visions or contemplations; we designate our beliefs as 'views,' sights which we have beheld. They are framed, perhaps, on the memory of hours when, 'with an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy, we *saw* into the life of things.' To Wordsworth, indeed, worship was not possible without love, and love could neither act nor exist

> 'Without imagination, which in truth
> Is but another name for absolute power,
> And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
> And reason in her most exalted mood.'

And from its progress he drew

> 'Faith in life endless, the sustaining thought
> Of human Being, eternity, and God.'*

* *Prelude*, xiv. 188 ff.

IV.

The connection of this faculty with what we call 'theological knowledge' is as intimate as it is with our knowledge of the external world or of each other. The process by which we conceive of God has its analogies, if it is not identical, with the process by which we discern the unity of the scene around us, or the corresponding unities which we call 'ourselves.' And these conceptions are for ever being revised, as experience widens, and fresh facts claim inclusion. It is always necessary that we should, as far as possible, get our beliefs into form, and give them definite contents: and that which seems to me ultimately to determine these forms is our perception of the congruity which subsists between the parts. If the new elements cannot enter into peaceful relations with the older fabric, it must be broken up and cast away. How many theories of consciousness will need revision if the principle of telepathy comes into general acceptance? What new views of the interaction of minds will be suggested, or how soon will science demand an elastic ether capable of transmitting the waves of thought and feeling!* On the other hand, just as the ultimate proof of equality that is sometimes offered in plane geometry is that you should put one triangle with the mind's eye upon another and see if they fit, so the truth of our higher views is established for us by the number and importance of the ideas which they will combine in concord; we try to get them into a sort of visual correspondence; and our final test is the satisfaction of our persistent demand for harmony. The passage of polytheism into monotheism exemplifies the mode in which monotheism resolves the plurality of conflicting wills into one energy operating everywhere and always, in response to the imperious demand that thought shall take the line of least

* Since this was written, Sir Wm. Crookes's address as President of the British Association at Bristol has supplied a curious confirmation.

resistance, shall mate with the growing consciousness of the interconnection of all the powers and objects of the universe, and blend all partial fragments into a perfect whole.

But even the monotheistic conception itself may assume very different aspects under this influence. Contrast the various phases of Yahweh in the Old Testament with the Zeus of Xenophanes or Cleanthes. Tennyson accused his countrymen (with a figure only one degree less startling than that of his brother poet Matthew Arnold) of thinking of God as 'an immeasurable English clergyman:' and between that clear cut figure and the Absolute dimly looming out of the vast obscure, is almost every conceivable diversity of representation. Among these different types what are the features that invite our choice? They are composed of many elements of speculative interest and of moral experience; and faith reposes in the form which most effectively binds together those which have for us the highest value. This act of union is completed by the religious imagination.

Thus, in the controversy which will always divide the theistic schools between what is called 'Monism' on the one hand and 'Pluralism' on the other, the issue really turns on how far the imaginative presentation which embraces the entire circle of existence within God, can also accommodate the conditions of the moral life as we know them; or how far in the striving after unity the diversities of our personal experience can be submerged in the ocean 'whereunto all things flow.'* There is the sublime apprehension of God, infinite, eternal, one. He is pure Being, in whom inhere all knowledge, will, and love. All conceivable creations, all possible universes, are simultaneously displayed before his thought, but he is not himself extended among any of them. The successions of duration pass by, but he shares them not. In his timelessness

* There are, of course, many forms of Monism, Indian, Greek, mediæval, modern.

there is neither past nor future. The divine repose which is yet in itself boundless self-moving and harmonious energy, cannot be broken by the incidents of change, for change must imply incompleteness. But the everlasting perfection is constantly the same, and no mutation can either enhance or impair its glory. Follow this conception in your imagination as you seek to link it with the world you know, and you will find that it carries with it, in some shape or other, the implications that all pain and suffering and loss are either fictions of our finite experience, or are part of the eternal experience as well as love, joy, peace. Nay, more; the whole contents of our personality are lost in God. The rise of our little life is but as the wave in the everlasting sea. The forms of our thought give us an appearance of self-hood, but in reality we are only fragments of the mighty consciousness which includes us and all that we have or seem to be, our strivings and our failures, our heroisms and our crimes. The world of change, limitation, and conflict, therefore, has only an illusory appearance, and is lost in the unity and immensity of God.

Over against this conception may be set another which affirms that the world *is*, as it *seems*, extended in space, and successive in time. These are the necessary conditions of all activity, divine as well as human. The years of the world, the years of the life of God, are indeed beyond our count; but they are real years. What is past to us is also past to him; the events of æons may live in his memory, but they are actually gone beyond recall. Within this world God sets up from age to age, in accordance with his purposes of wisdom and good, fresh centres of power differentiated from himself. They are endowed with separate individualities, in such a manner that, though the contents of their consciousness are known to his, they yet have an independent existence. The struggles of temptation within them are real struggles; the decisions which they take in the

crises of moral strife are real decisions. So absolutely are these left within our control, that even God himself cannot foresee them. Only within certain general limits, therefore, do the courses of events fall within his prevision. They are so arranged with reference to our freedom, as to tend towards certain ends; but the unexpectedness of the details is needed to engage the attention of Heaven, and provide the Supreme, as is quaintly said, with a continuous interest in life. Such a world is conceived (to use a homely image) as a great joint-stock company, in which Deity is the predominant partner.

Two universes are thus offered to us. If we start from our common experience, God is in some sense presented as physically diffused, like an impalpable ether, sustaining, energising everywhere. But he is limited by his own creations, and has to that extent voluntarily renounced some of his own infinitude; it must even be conceded that the separate wills which he has made may defy him for ever. If we start from the ultimate principles of being and thought, he is not comprised within the forms of created things at all. The relation of the world of our knowledge to his is incapable of explanation except on terms which make all our inner life unreal. But, on the other hand, an absolute unity of essence is maintained: one plan, one will, pervade the whole; the goal is for ever secure, because the beginnings lead inevitably to the end, and all their courses are compassed in the ever-present thought. The choice between such conceptions is not a choice of reason, for both pass beyond its scope. It is an option of imagination.* The result for our

* In the view of imagination that is here offered, the activity of reason supplies, of course, some of the data which imagination selects or rejects. In this selective and combining process, other influences are also at work, *e.g.* aesthetic appreciation. 'The indeterminism I defend,' says Prof. Wm. James, 'gives us a pluralistic, restless universe, in which no single point of view can ever take in the whole scene; and to a mind possessed with the love of unity at any cost, it will, no doubt, remain for ever unacceptable. A friend with such a mind once told me that the thought of my universe made him sick, like the sight of the horrible motion of a mass of maggots in their carrion bed.'—*The Will to Believe, and other Essays*, 177.

religion depends on the considerations which we have learned to regard as essential to our thought of God and man. Are you overwhelmed with the contrast between the poverty and littleness of our humanity and the majesty of the infinite and everlasting? Are you lost in adoration of the fulness of his beauty, the marvel of his all-embracing might? Do you apprehend him as the One in All, the All in One? Then you will contemplate him as the Eternal, in whom for ever inhere all truth and loveliness and good, before whose gaze time has no secrets, and in whose light all issues are foreseen for ever: and you will humbly lay at his feet the isolation and self-dependence claimed for human souls, a willing offering to his transcendent glory. Or are you persuaded that there is no knowledge if our faculties are not veracious, and no righteousness where there is not a higher and a lower? Do you find in the reasonableness of the world and in the judgments of conscience the bed-rock of faith? Do they provide for you the 'ποῦ στῶ' whence you will teach humanity to lift itself to God? Then you will select concordant attributes for your conception of him. You will recognise him, who cannot himself be supposed to be for ever exercising preferential judgments and electing to be God instead of devil, as at least manifesting his moral life by entering into your experience and strengthening you to choose the good and to reject the evil. But you will confess him to be physically conditioned by time and space, perhaps also by matter.* You will be unable to regard these as, in some mysterious way, forms of his own devising for the constitution of our world. They are independent in nature, yet perpetually concurrent with him. Where God wills and acts, there, too, are they. You will behold

* 'Waiving the question of the absolute beginning, we can intelligently take the position that God and material substance are eternal, coexistent entities, neither of them originated by or dependent upon the other.' Charles E. St. John, *New World*, June, 1898, p. 268. . . . 'Without God there would have been nothing in space but an all-pervading, blank expanse of ether,' *ibid.* 274.

them, therefore, determining the modes of his action, instead of his determining them. His throne will appear to you flanked with awful powers, from which even omnipotence cannot escape, and to which omniscience must continually submit. Before such alternatives reason succumbs. Imagination alone can make the daring flight, and seek by sympathetic selection to harmonise the incongruous, and present to itself some far-off glimpses of the mind of God.

V.

If this be for many minds the mode of apprehension of spiritual things, it would seem that the teacher of religion must aim at clearing away the obstacles to vision, and quickening the timid to walk along the path of insight. In all ages this has been the language of the seer; it is employed more sparingly under the conditions of modern philosophy; yet the processes remain essentially the same. The perception that the ideals of conduct within us are not all of equal value, that some are worthy, others base, may be described as a moral intuition. It does not depend on reasoning, any more than the discrimination of the series of colours in the rainbow. We actually present it to ourselves under the space-form of an ascending scale, wherein this is lower, that is higher; and if there be one who declares that he knows not, for instance, what reverence means,* we do not try to convince him by argument; we call him unawakened; the light of the glory and wonder of the world in which he lives has not yet dawned upon him. The early preaching of Buddhism, which appears to me remarkable for the delicacy and distinction of its moral psychology, is founded on this conception. Its primary object was to impart a view of life, as steeped in suffering which had its root in selfishness. Cast out the self

* '"Reverence," an able and intelligent gentleman from one of the British colonies once said to me, "is a thing I cannot understand"' (Bosanquet, *Civilisation of Christendom*, 61).

with its vain cravings, or, rather, recognise that the notion of an abiding centre of consciousness was an illusion, enter the noble eight-fold path of right conduct, right thought, right aspiration, and deliverance from the burden of evil was at hand. The recognition of these contrasted conditions of misery and salvation went by the name of the *Dhammacakkhu*, 'the eye of the truth.' Of the converted it is said that 'there arose within them the eye of the truth';* they had got the insight; and the oft-repeated formula of the grateful disciple praises the Buddha as the great enlightener: 'Most excellent, Lord, are the words of thy mouth, most excellent! Just as if a man were to reveal that which has been hidden away, or were to point out the right road to him who had gone astray, or were to bring a lamp into the darkness so that those who have eyes can see external forms, even so, Lord, has the truth been made known to us in many a figure by the Blessed One.'† It has always been the prophet's function to open blind eyes; and, from this point of view, the significance of Jesus is summed up in the Fourth Gospel alike in the healing act and in the tremendous saying, 'I am the light of the world.'

But of this insight there are many degrees, and it depends on conditions of which little is known. The power of visualising our spiritual impressions (if I may be allowed the term) is very unequal in different minds; it is not constant, it may be only in the highest degree occasional, even in the same mind. Isaiah 'sees' Yahweh enthroned in the heavenly sanctuary, and the vision sends him forth to a life-long ministry, but there is no record of its repetition. Paul can only recall one sublime ascension into the third heaven. Yet George Fox seems sometimes to live in a panorama of wonders veiled from common eyes—'I saw that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the

* So of Kondañña after the Buddha's first sermon, *Mahāvagga*, i. 6, 29; the Brahman Pokkharasādi, *Dīgha Nikāya*, iii. 2, 21, &c.

† 'Buddhist Suttas,' in *Sacred Books of the East*, xi. 203.

ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings.'* Even the modern man of the world, poet, critic, and humorist together, must needs use the same speech. 'I was at Mary's,' wrote James Russell Lowell to his friend G. B. Loring in 1842,† 'and happening to say something of the presence of spirits (of whom I said I was often dimly aware), Mr. Putnam entered into an argument with me on spiritual matters. As I was speaking, the whole system rose up before me like a vague destiny looming from the abyss. I never before so clearly felt the spirit of God in me and around me. The whole room seemed to me full of God. The air seemed to waver to and fro with the presence of something, I knew not what. I spoke with the calmness and clearness of a prophet.' Sometimes, indeed, these profound experiences take no external shape, however indistinctly vast. When the outspread world, bathed in the sunrise-glory, dissolved into God before the eyes of Wordsworth's Wanderer, he ceased to be conscious of outward form:

> 'In such access of mind, in such high hour
> Of visitation from the living God,
> Thought was not, in enjoyment it expired.
> No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
> Rapt into still communion that transcends
> The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
> His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
> That made him; it was blessedness and love!'

These, however, it will be said, are rare and exceptional insights. Be it so. But we only understand them at all because they give articulate utterance to the cloudier apprehensions of our own souls. The speech of seer and poet must ever remain a sealed book to us, unless we can imaginatively interpret it by the remembrance of hours when we, too, have been lifted above the level of our common life. It is the function of the higher mind to disclose to the lower the meaning of its dim struggles and the worth of its obscure experiences. I am well aware that

* *Journal*, in 1647. † *Letters*, i. 75.

I tread on perilous ground. The path of self-deception is always easy; and the history of religion is darkened with the outbreaks of hysterical folly. I will not even enquire now as to the cause or the inner validity of these transcendent moments. But it is important to point out that their imaginative form, so far as we can distinguish it from their spiritual content, is plainly related to the general scenic presentations (if I may so designate them) of divine things. The seers of Israel apprehended their God, in accordance with a mode of thought not unknown elsewhere, through the help of ideal types, as occupying a palace-temple on high, which was the celestial counterpart of the sacred house on Zion's hill. To the later Jew one heaven was inadequate to the grandeur of the world. Under influences, probably connected with the Mesopotamian scheme of the planets, the number superposed one above another had risen to seven.* Each had its appropriate sphere and meaning; and Paul believed himself to have visited the third. To the Catholic the revealing medium is the Eucharist, the suffering Redeemer on the crucifix, or a vision of the Virgin or a saint. The Quaker finds it in the conquest of temptation and the victory of Christ over the devil, as the darkness everywhere recedes before the light; the poet in the sunrise and the heart which has been prepared to 'receive deeply' Nature's 'lesson deep of love.' Now some of these elements depend on present or historic fact. If it be not true that at the priestly words of consecration the substance of the wafer is converted into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the apprehension of the Unseen, which has so often allied itself with this supreme faith, is not necessarily invalidated, but it will require a new imaginative form. The disbeliever in the Incarnation will never see the Virgin; he will envisage the reality of Providence under a different shape. It will be the same hereafter, if I mistake not, with that sense of forgiveness

* Cp. R. H. Charles, *Expository Times*, vii. 57.

which is often associated especially with the immediate agency of Christ. It will become more and more difficult to identify the objective spiritual reality with a historical person; and the soul, conscious of the appeal of infinite Love, will not seek to limit its channel to the human life through which Christianity first recognised it. In this respect, indeed, it may be said that significant changes are already on the way. The action of imagination on the conception of the person of Jesus is already producing marked theological results. Beginning with the common-places of historical enquiry, it has sought to reconstruct the scene of his ministry. It has surveyed his country; it has reproduced city and village, synagogue and temple. It has followed the fisherman on the lake, and the husbandman in the fields; it has listened to the discussions of the Rabbis, and mingled in the conflict of the sects. And in the centre of all, as it has traced the footsteps of the Teacher in home or school, at the workman's bench, by the lakeside, upon the mount, in the judgment-hall or on the cross, everywhere and always it has at last discovered a Man,—a man with a man's wants, a man's ignorance, a man's infirmity. But how is this compatible with the dogma that as the Eternal Word he was at the same time perfect God, wielding in wisdom and might the energy that upheld the universe? In what sense when he was a boy at Nazareth could he be also enlightening every man coming into the world? How in that dying hour of darkness and abandonment could he fill all space, produce the eclipse of light which publicly attested creation's horror at his fate, or maintain the stars upon the Milky Way?* Imagination is now frankly relinquishing the attempt to unite these incompatibilities, they can no longer be harmonised, and the

* 'Whilst he hung upon the cross, he was also in Athens, and ruled omnipresently the world': so the Swabian theologians Brenz and Andreæ, in opposition to Bullinger and Beza: Dorner, *Hist. of Prot. Theol.*, i. 365: cp. Van Dyke, *Gospel for an Age of Doubt*, 136—40, and 378.

enquiry into the cosmic action of the Word during the life of Jesus is silenced in impenetrable reserve. A re-interpretation of the person of Christ thus becomes inevitable, though it may be doubted whether the latest form will continue to satisfy the thinkers who now find it adequate. It depends on the conception that the attributes of infinity can be voluntarily resigned; that the divine Son could lay aside his omniscience, divest himself of his almighty power, and still enter as 'perfect God' within the limits of a human soul. Fixing upon the term *kenosis*, imagination is at present content with this singular symbol of an infinite person who empties himself of his infinity yet remains divine. But this contentment cannot long endure. It is inevitable that the attempt to realise the process should disclose further incongruities incapable of finding shelter in one view. What is the nature of a knowledge that can be thus poured forth from a boundless consciousness? What thought is there in what we call an infinite Mind which can be separated from his thinking? How are thinking and being, which are but two aspects of a common reality, to be severed by a voluntary act? Are not *cogitare* and *esse* in God one and the same? If God ceased to know himself, would he not also cease to be God? And yet we are told that the Eternal Word became an infant at the breast, and only arrived at self-consciousness when the Father revealed to him in the Baptismal hour who he was.* Fidelity to the Gospel record may take refuge for a time among these contradictions, but it cannot permanently retain them in its grasp; and the spiritual apprehension of God in and through Jesus Christ will again need a fresh investiture, and will weave for itself a new shape.

VI.

That our general conceptions of God are framed under a variety of influences is, in a certain sense, generally admitted.

* So Godet, *Comm. on John*, i. 14 (vol. i., p. 367, cp. 397, 400), and *The Thinker*, May, 1895, p. 391.

That they should change during a period of unusual intellectual activity, or moral excitement, or social advance, is therefore inevitable. And that such changes have largely taken place during the present century few will deny. They have operated deeply on that religious imagination whose varied activity I have endeavoured to suggest to your thought. On the one hand philosophy by its enquiry into the processes of mind and the ultimate grounds of reality, on the other hand science by its investigations into the history and constitution of the material world, have enforced the ideas of unity and uniformity, of continuity, of universality, as they have never been realised before. Along every avenue of research the demands on space and time have been enlarged. The processes of nature have been discovered to be infinitely more complex and wonderful than had been dreamed: the field is indefinitely vaster, and the play of myriad forces more constant and subtle. If man is exalted by his astonishing successes, he is also dwarfed in the presence of immensity. And this immensity is *one*. The throne of the universe admits of no rival. The Adversary has been for ever expelled, though the victory over death seems as far off as ever: and the mighty mass of the whole world's pain falls, almost unrelieved, within the agency of God. It is little short of a revolution, and belief still staggers from the shock. The contradiction which seems to be thus introduced into the Divine Nature is solved in various ways; and the known area of sentiency upon our globe is small, indeed, compared with the majesty of the universe. Faith is still strong enough to overcome the conflict which it can neither terminate nor explain: for the perception of an intellectual order around us is reinforced by other elements which powerfully appeal to our sympathetic imagination, such as the discernment of beauty and the consciousness of good. The geometric presentation of God as thinking out the relations of systems by processes of

deduction from his first principles gives way to that of the artist in whose mind there rises spontaneously the image of the whole, so that God appears to us as 'the perfect poet,' who alone can perfectly live out his own creations. In the loveliness of the outward scene the insight of affection encounters the appeal of love to the soul within; while the elements of beauty in symmetry, proportion, harmony, reveal a close affinity with the ethical aspects of character in justice and right. The prominence of these attributes in our imaginative apprehension of the Deity at the present day, suffices to bear the new strain involved in the ascription of physical evil to the direct action of an immediate Will, in which all causality resides, while it has driven the cruder forms of other doctrine off the field. It has banished for ever the theories of election and substitutionary atonement, once taught on the basis of a few scattered texts, combined by the methods of mediæval jurisprudence; and it will ere long completely harmonise the conception of King with that of Father, so that (as far as human destiny is concerned) sovereignty will realise its purposes through education, and the discipline of our existence is justified as all souls are joined in common adoration of the Eternal. The influence of ethical development on the religious imagination is not, indeed, at present exhausted, for the simple reason that the ethical development itself is still in process. Concerning the personal contents of the idea of good, it may, indeed, be doubted whether future generations are likely to advance beyond the preacher of the Sermon on the Mount. But there is a social idea, the very existence of which we are only dimly beginning to realise. It declares that the individual is not, and never can be, complete in himself. It points to possibilities of more intricate consciousness than can ever be fulfilled by a single mind. It seeks to discover the mysterious links of internal connection which bind the members of communities to one another, and link

the separate groups into one great chain of spiritual development, so that the whole of humanity may be conceived as one mighty growth, with new ethical implications among its parts, and, as a consequence, new ethical ideals.

Among these may, perhaps, be noticed as a single and more obvious instance, the influence of the principles of democracy upon our view of the administration of the world. The aspiration of the prophet for the diffusion of the knowledge of the Lord among the least as among the greatest, so that teaching should be needed no more, is essentially a democratic aspiration. It is founded on the abolition of privilege, on the recognition (for purposes of government) of the equal worth of all. When that conception is applied to the diversities of religion, its immediate effect is to suppress their rivalries, abate their separate pretensions to supremacy, and secure the corresponding recognition of similar values relatively in each. If all altars be thus legitimated, the claims of any church to the exclusive possession of the way of salvation fade into silence; the prerogative of the keys is broken, and history, at least, must testify to some kind of equality of opportunity. So the Jew, who meditated on the sole deposit of the law with Israel, combined it with the universality of providential purpose and revealing grace by the legend that, in the thunders of Sinai, God addressed his commands in seventy languages* to all the nations, but Israel only then had ears to hear; while the Alexandrian, following a similar instinct, affirmed that, if Israel had found its training for Christ through the law, philosophy had rendered the same service to the Greeks.† The counterpart of this is the perception that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is acceptable to him. It remains only to take the further step, for which the religion of insight has been always

* Such was the interpretation of the *qôlôth* of *Ex.* xx. 18; see *Midrash on Ex.* tr. Wünsche, 56.

† Clem. Alex., *Strom.* vi. 5.

ready, and identify the object of worship through every diversity of rite. The poet of the Masnavi, Muhammed of Balk, who died in the year before Thomas Aquinas, 1273, thus escapes from the limits of Islam :—

> 'In the adorations and benedictions of righteous men
> The praises of all the prophets are kneaded together.
> Because he that is praised is in fact only one,
> In this respect all religions are only one religion.'

Moses, he relates, once heard a shepherd praying, 'O God, show me where thou art, that I may become thy servant. I will clean thy shoes, and comb thy hair, and sew thy clothes, and fetch thee milk.' And Moses rebuked him as an infidel, and the shepherd rent his garment and fled. But a voice from heaven was heard saying, 'Wherefore hast thou driven away my servant? Thy office is to reconcile my people with me, not to drive them from me. I have given to each race different usages and forms of praising and adoring me. I have no need of their praises, and I regard not the words that are spoken, but the heart that offers them.'*

VII.

The conception is thus reached of the fundamental sympathy of religions, which corresponds to the view of revelation already indicated at an earlier stage of this discourse. To the history and phases of that idea I shall invite your attention in the ensuing academic year. It must be enough to observe now a singular illustration of this sympathy in the fact, that the ideas which I have already contrasted tend to reappear in one after another of the higher faiths. If the prophets of Israel were regarded as the oracles of a heavenly voice, the sages of India were supposed to have *seen* the self-subsistent archetypes of their ancient hymns. If the Bible was defended as from end to end the word of God, divinely inerrant, the Veda was, in like manner,

* *Masnavi I Ma'navi*, tr. Whinfield, pp. 139, 82.

supernaturally infallible.* It was, indeed, only the reproduction upon earth of a heavenly pattern, ideally pre-existent like the pattern of the tabernacle shown to Moses on the mount. So it belonged to the realm of the deathless, incapable of change or decay: and having no bounds, it was infinite. It was, therefore, eternal and immutable, and shone for ever as a source of light. By a similar conception was the law, revealed to Zoroaster, invested with supreme authority. Daêna, the name of the specific precepts in the sacred books, became also (like the Hebrew *torah*) a designation of the religion which they enforced. She, too, existed in the heavenly world. Homage is paid her, the sixteenth of the Yashts or acts of worship being consecrated to her; and from her dwelling in heaven, the Garothman or 'home of song,' does Zoroaster summon her, beseeching her fellowship and praying for righteousness of thought and speech and deed.† This law, as it emanates from Ahura Mazda, the omniscient Lord, is his *mâthra spenta*, or holy word. It issues from his mouth, as a strong weapon for those who can wield it.‡ By a similar process did later Israel figure to itself the ideal of its law as the first thing that proceeded from Omnipotence before the world. It bore within it the types of all creation, so that when God would call the universe into being, he first looked into the Torah, and found there the great design of earth and heaven.§ It might even be called by Yahweh his 'son,'‖ and the Rabbis discussed whether it was not made before his throne. Strangest of all strange developments of the religious imagination is the picture of Deity presiding over a heavenly Sanhedrin, discussing the details of interpretation and issuing new rules for future guidance. In this atmosphere of impalpable ideals even Islam worked out a similar doctrine. The Qoran was the utterance of the word of

* Cp. Muir, *Sanskrit Texts*, III. ii. §§ 7—12.
† *S.B.E.*, xxiii., 264.
‡ *S.B.E.*, iv., 207.
§ *Midrash on Gen.*, i., 1, tr. Wünsche, p. 1.
‖ *Midr. on Lev.*, tr. Wünsche, 137.

God: it must itself, therefore, partake of the existence of that word from everlasting to everlasting. Little more than a century after the death of Mohammed the doctrine of the uncreated character of the Qoran was formulated, based on the idea of the eternity of its origin in Allah's mind.* There is, perhaps, no more singular episode in the history of sacred books than the record of the debates at Bagdad which sprang out of this conception—the popular clamour on its behalf, the protests of rationalism declaring that that which consisted in letters and sounds could not be self-subsistent and everlasting, the mosques crowded with thousands of eager listeners while the theologians disputed whether God's word could be conceived distinct from his absolute being, and the Caliphs on opposite sides trying to stop discussion with the sword. The issue could not be doubtful. The Qoran as it lies between the two covers is Allah's own word, which he imparted by way of inspiration to the prophet.† In due time the person of the revealer grew more and more important in comparison with the person whom he revealed; and the Arabian shepherd could be designated as the inerrant, the sinless, the uncreated light, and invoked more frequently even than God himself.‡

But over against these limitations, the history of religion presents other types embodying the conception that Revelation is a perpetual process, so that the world and life, the starry heavens and the moral law, are alike its organs and make their common appeal to the soul of man. Here is, in truth, the answer of the wisdom of the race to the deepest of all doubts—Is there anything in the constitution of the universe which corresponds with the order of my thought, the commands of my conscience, the aspirations of my love? I have affirmed my belief that for many minds the answer to this question is not to be reached by

* Von Kremer, *Die Herrschenden Ideen des Islams*, 233 ff.
† So the Qâdy 'Iyâd in the thirteenth century, Von Kremer, *Ideen*, 249.
‡ In a widely used prayer book of the fourteenth century, *ibid.*, 162.

way of proof so much as by vision. We do not attain it by the processes of reasoning, we discern it by the penetration of insight. The power of discernment depends on the discipline of thought and character, and (intellectually speaking) rests largely on the completeness with which we can picture to ourselves the myriad diversities of things as knit into one whole, so that physics and ethics shall be different sides of the same reality. When Emerson declared* that he looked for the teacher who should 'see the identity of gravitation with purity of heart,' he did not expect the demonstration to be offered in a university laboratory. In seeking to bind his days into the same order as that of the most ancient skies, Wordsworth relied on something beside the tables of an astronomical almanac. Once more, then, 'theological knowledge' founds itself on the imaginative apprehension of the ultimate unity.

Enter an Egyptian temple, or unseal the rock-cut tomb, and you will probably see the figure of a woman wearing upon her head an ostrich plume, the symbol of truth. Her name is Maāt, from the root *mā* 'stretch out.'† She is the symbol of rule, of rectitude, of right. She represents the ideas of truth, which is the harmony of the thought within and the world without, and justice, which is the harmony of the individual and social life alike among men and gods, the living and the dead. She appears among the most antique forms, and constitutes the very principle of the existence of Deity, for it is the mark of a divine being to 'live' or 'exist' 'by' or 'upon' Maāt. She is the eye Rā, the solar disc, she is 'lady of heaven' and queen on the earth, lady likewise of the land of the west where the sun takes his nightly course and the souls of the departed follow him, so that all parts of the universe own her sway. So, too, in the sphere of

Address to the Divinity School at Cambridge (1838).

†Cp. Renouf, *Hibb. Lectures*, 119 : Brugsch, *Religion und Mythologie der Alten Aegypter*, 477 : Wiedemann, *Religion of Ancient Egyptians*, 142 : Budge, *Papyrus of Ani*, cxix. : St. Clair, *Creation Records*, 201.

government which should reflect the majestic order of the skies, she is the principle of polity which binds together sovereign and subjects, and as such she is the most precious offering which a monarch can make to the powers above, the most precious gift which the gods can bestow upon the king. Again and again upon the temple walls is her image figured on a dish which the royal celebrant holds out before the altar, saying, 'I offer to thee the goddess Maāt, I lift her up before thy face:' and the deity replies, 'I lay the truth in thine heart to manifest her everlastingly before the gods, I cause truth to find an abiding dwelling on the earth, and I separate the lie from thy palace: I give thee truth, live in her; remain united with her, and let thy heart rejoice in her.'

Consult the ancient wisdom of China, and you will find it resting upon a somewhat similar conception. The foundation of morals alike for the person and the state is the sublime co-ordination of the heavens and earth which form the visible manifestation of the 'grand unity.'* According to a well-known mythological symbol they are the parents of all things. The courses of the sun and moon, the faithful seasons which pace their yearly round, follow the road or 'path' which has been indicated to them from above. From the same source are derived the 'lessons transmitted to men and called its orders,' 'the law and authority of them is in heaven.' There is thus a 'way' of heaven, and a 'way' of earth, and a 'way' of man to correspond, Heaven being in fact a venerable equivalent for God, based on the original worship of the living sky. The poet could affirm that 'Heaven, in giving birth to the multitude of the peoples, to every faculty and relationship affixed its law'† 'Ah,' said Confucius approvingly, 'the author of this ode knew the constitution of our nature.'‡ The counsellor of

* In the 'Li Ki,' *S.B.E.*, xxvii. 387.
† *Shi King* (tr. Legge), III., pt. iii., vi. 1. ‡ *Mencius* (tr. Legge), VI., pt. i., vi. 8.

kings founds his exhortation on the same conception: 'The sovereign must remember that the work is Heaven's; it is for men to act upon it. From Heaven are the social arrangements with their several duties. . . . . When the sovereign and minister show a common respect for these, do they not harmonise the moral nature of the people? Heaven hears and sees as our people see. Such connexion is there between the upper and the lower worlds. How reverent ought the masters of the earth to be.'* The interaction of heaven and earth, their mutual relations, their impartial love for all, the equilibrium which they maintain, are the roots of Chinese ethics, and suggested the famous Confucian doctrine of Reciprocity. The true sage, it is said, enters into the moral relations which unite earth and heaven in one vast and beneficent order, and he 'forms a Ternion with them:'† or, as it is phrased more briefly, 'Perfection of nature is characteristic of Heaven; to attain to that perfection belongs to man.'‡ 'Be ye perfect,' said Jesus, 'as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

Among the elder thoughts of the Aryan race, also, is this perception of the ultimate unity of the physical and moral worlds. The Vedic hymns are conspicuous for the prominence which they give to the idea of law, and the variety of the terms by which they designate it.§ One only, the *Ṛ́ta*, acquires an abiding place in the higher imagination, and serves as the medium for combining in a single form the solemn order of creation, of worship, and morally of truth and right. Whether with Roth and Grassmann and Bergaigne its root *ar* be connected with that of the Greek ἀραρίσκω, so that it denotes that which is fitted, joined, or fixed; or whether with Prof. Max Müller‖ and Ludwig it be regarded as that which is gone, and hence the path which is traversed in the going—does not affect its significance as the

* *Shu King* (tr. Legge), II., iii., 5, 6. † 'Li Ki,' *S.B.E.*, xxviii. 319.
‡ Li Ki,' *S.B.E.*, xxviii. 317. § Thus *dhāman, dharman, vrata.*
‖ *Hibb. Lect.* 237.

lofty symbol of the coherence of all visible things.* Day after day the dawn, which is its guardian, faithfully obeys its behest. According to its law are her horses harnessed; from it as their home does she start upon the way; by it she guides the reins and, when the night comes, *ri*ta springs forth anew. It is by *ri*ta also that the rivers flow; of *ri*ta even the storm-gods are the offspring. The wide expanse of heaven is her domain. In *ri*ta do the gods rejoice, and the lofty Varu*n*a and the boundless Aditi count it among their high functions to protect it. Nay, the gods themselves are born from it, as they are also born in it, or according to it. But it has another aspect as it presides over sacrifice, which ultimately acquired a peculiar significance as the mystic counterpart of the processes of creation: and it is also the secret principle of morality. As such it is the correlate of *satya*, 'that which is,' the existent, true, and good. Heaven and earth are *satya*, 'veracious'; they can be trusted; they are *ri*tāvan, 'faithful to the law,' steadfast and unperturbed with tranquil course. And so, likewise, is the devout worshipper who follows the *ri*ta. For him the pasturage of Aditi is broad; and he, too, bears the same epithet, given alike to the world and to the gods, he is *ri*tāvan, 'faithful to right,' pious or godly. It is the imaginative form of the same sublime conception, according to which God, nature, man, answer each other in unseen harmony. The successions of visible things are but the veil of an ideal principle which is likewise the secret of worship, and the moral strength of common life. The same principle inheres in the heavenly powers, so that at the heart of all existence are the good and true.

Do you turn to the other branch of our Aryan forefathers, who chanted the ancient hymns of which fragments still survive in the Zend Avesta? There, too, you may discover the same

* A long list of passages from the *Rig Veda* will be found in Grassmann's *Lexicon*, s.v. Other material in Ludwig, *Rig Veda*, iii., 284; Bergaigne, *La Religion Védique;* Wallis, *Cosmology of the R.V.*, &c., iv.

idea, designated by the same name, yet with a different emphasis, and perhaps a more theological content. For there, too, *Asha*, the philological equivalent of the Indian *ṛita*,* is the principle of order, whether in nature, in ritual, or morality, and her home is the bosom of God. In poems of various origins and dates the lines of portraiture are not altogether consistent, yet the total impression is singularly harmonious. In that awful hour when the spirits of good and evil had finished each his part in the creation, they chose their separate realms; and the bounteous spirit chose Asha, putting on as a vesture the firm stones of heaven,† so that the vault of sky—elsewhere presented as the garment or robe of the All-Righteous—is the fabric wrought by Asha. Or again, Asha was created by Ahura when his all-glorious conceptions clothed themselves in the stars, the ordering of the nightly host being its work: through Asha did the sun arise and set, and the moon wax and wane. Asha sustains the earth beneath and the clouds above, yokes the winds to the storm-clouds, and inspires the good thoughts within our souls. Asha, too, hath made the light and the darkness, sleep and the zest of waking hours: and Asha spread the auroras, noontide and midnight, monitors to discerning man, duty's true guides.‡ But it has a ritual as well as a cosmic aspect. It signifies the due performance of the sacrifice, and as Agni, the fire on the sacred hearth, the dear house-priest in the Indian home, was *ṛita*-born, so Asha was connected with sacrificial purity, and came specially to denote the cleansing flame. In its character of holy ritual, also, it gives its name to the most sacred of all prayers, the *ashem vohu*, which opens with the declaration, 'holiness is the best of all good; well is it with that holiness which is the perfection of holiness.'§ And so it passes into the supreme symbol of the Moral Order by

* Darmsteter, *Ormazd et Ahriman*, i.; Max Müller, *Hibb. Lect.*, 249. A useful collection of passages is given by Justi, *Handbuch der Zendsprache*, 39.

† *S.B.E.*, xxxi. 30. ‡ *Ibid.* 113-114. § *S.B.E.*, xxiii. 22.

which the power of evil will be finally subdued. When the Omniscient created the inspired word of reason, Asha was with him consenting in his deed.* It is to Ahura, with Asha by his side, that Zoroaster appeals to grant gladness to his disciples, and the 'sovereignty or 'kingdom' (the angel of the kingdom of God): 'when shall Asha,' cries the prophet, 'and the good Mind, and the Kingdom come hastening to me to give me strength for my task and mission?'† So it is Asha that the pious man (called *ashavan*, parallel with the Vedic *ri*tāvan) follows in word and deed, and it is in the fulness of Asha that Ahura Mazda will bestow Universal Weal and Immortality, and will likewise give the Good Mind's vigorous might to him who in spirit and in action is his friend. In its highest aspect Asha Vahista, the most excellent Asha, is the second in the group of the Holy Immortals who surround Ahura's throne, the first being Vohu Mano, a kind of holy spirit or Good Mind.‡ To Asha thus conceived there belonged especially (as to its Indian counterpart) the character of truth, for in the Greek explanation it is identified with ἀλήθεια.§ And to Asha in this exalted character the devout disciple paid his homage: 'the most excellent Asha do we worship, the bountiful Immortal, that which is endowed with light and all things good.'¶ Once more, the Righteous Order is not only heaven's first law, it is itself a divine power. It is the revelation of a holy will in the world of material existence, in the struggle of good and evil in nature, and in the similar conflict in man. It is discerned not so much by intellectual insight as by moral sympathy. It has for its comrades in Ahura's service the noble impersonations of the Good Mind and the Kingdom of Righteousness. It is the very form under which the Supreme displays himself, for fourth upon the list of Ahura's wondrous names is the declaration, 'My

* *S.B.E.*, xxxi. 10. † *Ibid.* xxxi. 12. ‡ *S.B.E.*, xxiii. 31.
§ *De Iside* (commonly assigned to Plutarch), 46-47. ¶ *S.B.E.*, xxxi. 286.

name is Asha Vahista,' the most excellent Order.* Well might the 'way of perfection,' the advance to the 'great Renovation,' the sublime climax of the *frashokereti*, 'making the world move onwards,' lead through 'union with Asha,'† the Righteous Order of creation, conscience, God.

VIII.

The general resemblance of these conceptions, in spite of many differences, to the Wisdom of the Israelites and the Reason, Logos, or Word of the Greeks, I hope to point out to you hereafter. I have sketched these solemn figures for you this evening to indicate the answers of the higher faiths of antiquity to the questions which still beset us to-day. They, at least, support that view of the sympathy of religions to which modern discovery has so strikingly guided us; do they not also confirm the belief that the revelation of God is rather to be found in the stable and continuous elements of life than in the exceptional or unique? And this belief, in fine, provides the answer to that chill care which sometimes arises on the decline of the older conception of revelation, as the positive communication of definite truths about the destiny of man or the inner constitution of the Godhead. That conception possessed one feature of immense importance; it testified to the interest which God felt in the world. It emphasised the sublime intent which rose higher and higher through patriarch, and law-giver, and prophet, and shone with its fullest glory in the incarnate Son. It laid stress on the Father's purpose that somewhere, at least, upon this globe the real truth should be known. It provided that God had never left himself without a witness; and though it might, indeed, be strange that this revelation should have come to earth in Judea, amid the despised of the peoples, the choice did but lay upon the infant church the more imperative duty to carry forth among all

* *S.B.E.*, xxiii. 25. † *S.B.E.*, xxxi. 34.

nations the only name whereby man might be saved. But now the religion of the Bible is known but as one of many. The temple and the tomb have yielded up the secrets of an incalculable past. The voices of seers, the teachings of sages, are heard from land to land; a golden chain of praise knits together all members of the race; and no sooner has one philosophy offered its interpretation of the universe, than its counterpart arises from some distant century, or makes its appearance on the other side of the earth. So many opinions, so many vain guesses, does it not seem as if God were indifferent to our thought of him? He does not protect us from error on the most significant of all themes: he does not shield us from mistaking falsehood for fact; nay, subtler apprehension still, does not this silence imply that he is indifferent also to the Truth? Is not the value of our homage to the supreme reality belittled when God himself apparently sets by it so small a store? Or why should he suffer such diversity, why should he not at least make certain, beyond all possibility of illusion, that he is? I think that many minds are conscious of a strange shiver as they look out on the vast spaces of immensity and feel that the Creator who fills them has left not only his character, but his very being, open to discussion. In this remoteness man loses his grandeur—he is not sufficiently important in the divine eyes to be the object of revelation; and truth its solemnity—it is not precious enough for God to put it out of reach of vague denial. It has not been guarded, because it is held too cheap. God keeps aloof from us, so that our mistakes about him give him no concern, though they be matters of life and death to us. Our boasted freedom means only unlimited permission to go astray; the price of liberty is perpetual doubt.

There are many answers to this pathetic plea, which rings with so many variations through the higher literature of our time. I will not anticipate the arguments of the class-room;

I will only point out that the difficulty which besets our 'theological knowledge' is not peculiar to it. The Author of our being has simply placed the knowledge of himself on the same footing with all other knowledge of the world and life. Consider those elementary beginnings when primitive man stood face to face with nature, and contrast the mind of the savage who has no name for number above three with that of Newton binding the heavens and the earth within the scope of one imperial law; and then realise that the faculties by which God invites us along the path of science are the same as those which he bids us use within the sphere of faith. The range of facts upon which they are exercised may be different, but the processes of reasoning, the activities of discovery, the insight which brings unity and harmony, these do not change. By the same lines of experience, judgment, apprehension, which guide us to belief in one another, do we discern the presence of mind and will in the scene around. The scale is expanded as you range from man through the universe to God, but the method is essentially the same. God thus deigns to put the truth about himself on an identical basis with all other truth. Is this to lower the significance of religion? On the contrary, it is to enhance the value of our common thought, and bring the whole realm of knowledge into relation with the only True. The modes by which the Divine Mind offers itself to our comprehension in the world are found to have their correspondences within ourselves. That world can only be interpreted by our reason because God's reason has first made it rational; and we discover the connections of events, the sequences of causes and effects, inasmuch as God has rendered them intelligible, by arranging our minds to match his own. In other words, God thinks in us and we in him, and the essence of all mind is one. We are but as the single rays, that start from anywhere in the diffusive centre of his infinitude, and he the boundless sphere which includes them

all; yet along each line flash messages of mystery which convey to the understanding heart 'authentic tidings of invisible things,' and reveal an immensity that is full of light. The higher affections thus all ascend by varying paths to a common goal. The apprehensions of truth, of beauty, of righteousness, are each directed towards the same infinite reality; and wonder, reverence, and love are as the angels which pass and repass upon the heavenly stair. Whether the facts with which we deal be what we call external—made known to us through the physical world, or internal, namely, the impulses, desires, passions, sentiments, aspirations, awakened within us by our contact with each other or our reflection on ourselves, all alike are brought to the same inner tribunal, all are interpreted by the same mind, judged by the same thought, combined and unified by the same insight. So, the ideals which visit us are the continuous appeal of the infinite Spirit to our own; and the preacher who speaks of them must preach that which he has seen and known. His speech will be declaratory not demonstrative, the λόγος ἀποφαντικός of the old philosophy, rather than ἀποδεικτικός, and his exhortation to enquirers will take the form *intra te quaere Deum.*

And yet that, after all, is not the final word. The goal of Hebrew prophecy was to 'know the Lord.' At the entrance of the most sacred shrine of the deity who was pre-eminently for Greece the god of revelation, on the temple of Apollo at Delphi, Hellenic wisdom inscribed the striking exhortation 'know thyself.'* I have tried to show that in one aspect these are but the obverse and reverse of the coin of faith. But there is another in which it seems impossible thus to ally them. What if our self-knowledge convince us only of the dulness of our insight, the poverty of our endeavours, the little worth of our daily achievement, the negative insignificance or the positive selfishness

* 'That word, if I am not mistaken, is put there as a sort of salutation which the god addresses to those who enter the temple,' Plato, *Charmides*, 164 (Jowett[3], i. 23). On the position of the inscription cp. Frazer, *Pausanias*, vol. v. 348.

that is stamped across our life? The discovery may, indeed, be full of pain, yet it is impossible to the eye that is not at least partially open. We cannot tell that our sight is dim, unless we can already perceive the same forms as clearer seers, though their radiant hues be shrouded in obscurity and their outlines hazy and confused. But the distincter discernment of the pure in heart teaches us first to trust and then to purify our own. We gain new confidence when we learn that our vague yearnings, our faint aspirations, are at once articulate and satisfied in them. This is for us the value of the prophet and the saint; through the summit minds we look out into the infinite without terror, for they bid us see as they saw, and know as they have known. This may be described as revelation through persons. It is the human channel for us of the highest knowledge which gives assurance to our own feebler apprehension, and teaches us to remove the veils of fear and care. That God is, may be said to be the perpetual discovery of the whole race. What God is, we know by his self-disclosure in the holiest souls, in proportion as we can repeat afar off their experience through its quickening power upon our own. To be the medium of this vivifying influence is the calling of the teacher of religion. If you undertake it you must strive to be loyal to its conditions; you must arm yourselves against its difficulties and dangers, as well as look forward to its privileges and joys. Gravest of difficulties, most subtle of dangers, is the secret mistrust of the worth of the divine vision within you. It will seem so strange that others cannot recognise what you behold, or are indifferent to what kindles you with hope and love. The hour may come when you may have to stand alone. There is a Calvary, or something like it, once at least in most men's lives, when the oppositions of evil are too strong for us, and purposes are broken, and resolution falters and dies. The glory that has lighted other days may set in gloom. Take refuge, then, in

the faith of Jesus, and the vast multitude whom that faith has upheld, and you will know in God's good time that he is sure. Through them he will tenderly quicken your souls afresh; the might of trust will rise in new unconquerable life; and you will front what seems like moral chaos, and not quail.

'Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest
Cannot confound nor doubt him, nor deny:
Yea with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.'